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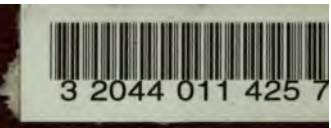

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THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA

An Address before the Congregational Club of Brooklyn

By GEORGE F. SEWARD, LL.D.

Formerly United States Minister at Peking, China

1902

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THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA.

THE question of the evening is "International Justice as to China." The discussion, if adequate at all, must take a broad range.

It involves our duties to China and to the Chinese people in matters that concern them within our home territory.

It involves our duties to that people and government in matters that are domestic to them.

It involves our duties in the still broader field of the relations of the foreign powers generally to China.

The notable matter in the history of our domestic dealings with the Chinese is their exclusion from our territory.

A broad principle, recognized by us generally from the beginning of our national existence, is the right of the people of other countries to come into our country and to live among us under the equal protection of our

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This paper contains the substance of an address made by Mr. Seward before the Congregational Club, of Brooklyn, on the evening of October 28th, 1902. It is published in the hope that it may promote the cause of justice to China, and particularly to indicate that our country should use all of its great moral weight to defend the integrity of the territory of China.

laws. This principle was solemnly set forth in an Act of Congress, approved July 27th, 1868, as follows:

"*Whereas*, The right of expatriation is a natural and inherent right of all people, indispensable to the enjoyment of the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; and, whereas, in the recognition of this principle this Government has freely received emigrants from all nations and invested them with the rights of citizenship; and, whereas, it is claimed that such American citizens, with their descendants, are subjects of foreign States, owing allegiance to the governments thereof; and, whereas, it is necessary to the maintenance of public peace that this claim of foreign allegiance should be promptly and finally disavowed; therefore, any declaration, instruction, opinion, order, or decision of any officer of the United States which denies, restricts, impairs or questions the right of expatriation, is declared inconsistent with the fundamental principles of the Republic."

That the principle involved was not meant to be confined to an interchange of residence between our people and the people of other so-called "civilized" States is indicated by the terms of a treaty between the United States and China, commonly known as the "Burlingame Treaty," that was proclaimed on the 28th of July of the same year.

"The United States of America and the Emperor of China cordially recognize the inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance, and also the mutual advantage of the free migration and emigration of their citizens and subjects respectively, from the one country to the other, for the purposes of curiosity, of trade, or as permanent residents."

One might reasonably suppose that a principle of national action set forth so solemnly, and following the line of precedent from the beginning of our national experience, would not be set aside lightly. It was, however set aside; and I think you will be disposed to

believe, when I recite the facts, that it was set aside lightly. As they occurred during my own time as Minister to China and shortly thereafter, the narrative will be somewhat personal.

In the spring of 1879, barely eleven years after the proclamation of the Burlingame treaty, I was at home from China on furlough. Feeling concern lest there might be precipitated upon me, as Minister to China, some unwelcome duty in regard to the matter of immigration, and particularly because the subject was likely to be a factor in the Presidential election then approaching, I prepared and submitted to the Secretary of State a memorandum setting forth my views. In that document I indicated my belief that the United States ought not to depart from its traditional policy as respects free immigration, but that it could properly seek to forestall and prevent the coming into our country of disfavored classes of the Chinese, to wit: contract laborers, paupers, criminals, diseased persons and prostitutes. Such limitations in fact could not be held to run counter to our traditional policy, nor to our practices thereunder.

I submitted further a proposal to make this plan effective by providing, in concert with the Chinese Government, for courts of inquest consisting of American and Chinese officials, sitting at proper places in China, before whom should appear persons wishing to come to this country, the duty of the courts being to require proof that no such proposing emigrants could be properly included in either of the objectionable categories stated.

I was greatly gratified upon receiving a little later information that the Secretary of State approved my proposals and had requested me to prepare my own instructions on the lines stated. I did prepare such instructions fully and carefully, and before I left the

country I received them precisely in the terms in which I had written them, signed by the Secretary himself.

Upon my return to China I entered upon the necessary negotiations with the Chinese Government, presenting the matter in a series of interviews with the members of the Foreign Office, and secured their approval, including details as to the constitution of the courts in question. So far the business had proceeded to my great satisfaction.

I then sent to Washington a full account of these negotiations, including the notes passed with the Chinese Foreign Office, with the statement that the Chinese Government was ready to execute a formal treaty or convention accordingly. It may surprise you to learn that I never received from the State Department at Washington so much even as an acknowledgment of my report. Having done what I was instructed to do, the failure to respond to my report was neither courteous to me nor to the Chinese Foreign Office.

A few months later, in the early summer of 1880, I learned that Dr. Angell, President of the University of Michigan, a man of character and distinction, had been appointed my successor as Minister to China, and that there had been associated with him, as Commissioners to negotiate a treaty to limit Chinese immigration, two other gentlemen of distinction, Mr. Trescott of South Carolina and Mr. Swift of California. In due course these gentlemen arrived, and I turned over my official charge to Dr. Angell. Before I left Peking I learned on the best authority that the Commissioners had brought no definite instructions, and in fact that the only written instructions held by them were such as might be implied from a letter from the Secretary of State transmitting to them planks of the respective Presidential election platforms, Republican

and Democratic, disfavoring Chinese immigration.

These gentlemen proceeded to make a treaty with China that practically superseded the Burlingame treaty, and provided that the Government of the United States, when and to such extent as it should think desirable, might enact laws to restrict immigration for a period of ten years. Perhaps it ought to be stated, although it bears an unpleasant significance, that when members of the Chinese Foreign Office, at the beginning of these negotiations, asked what was unsatisfactory in the agreements made by them with Mr. Seward, the answer was given that "Mr. Seward had no authority to advance his proposals." We must presume, although it puts some strain upon us, that the member of the Commission who made this response had not taken the trouble to read the instruction given to me by the State Department, that at the moment was on file in the Legation archives.

The sum of all this is that under political pressure and for purposes of political effect on the Pacific Coast, as one may judge, the State Department set aside without hesitation our traditional policy as respecus immigration, and the policy set forth specifically as repects Chinese immigration in the Burlingame treaty.

It may not be amiss to say here that the effort, so far as California was concerned, failed of its purpose. That was the campaign of Garfield and Hancock. During the course of the campaign there was put out on the Pacific Coast what was called the "Morey" letter. It was given in *fac-simile* form in the handwriting of Mr. Garfield, and bore his *fac-simile* signature. The letter was not genuine. It was made up of matter, presumably spoken by Mr. Garfield, indicating friendliness to the principle of free immigration. The result was that the State of California went Democratic by thirty-two votes!

I shall not enter upon a discussion of the general treatment of Chinese in the United States. It would take too long to recite wrongs to which these patient people have been subjected in our country before and since that treaty was made. Besides, it becomes possible for one to hope that as time passes the old bitter feeling against them, and the old fears of an overflowing immigration, are dying out, and that sooner or later the question will come up for review under happier auspices.

In presenting the matter thus far I have assumed that you believe that the traditional policy of the United States is consistent with justice. I cannot doubt that you so believe, for I assume further that you are persons who bring all questions to the very highest test. This is a world not of irresponsible tribes or stocks or nationalities, but a world over which presides One who is high in the Heavens and who is no respecter of persons. Can it be that the Divine Being believes that an honest man, be he white or black or yellow, should not be free to go anywhere on his footstool? One might argue about the matter before any other kind of an audience, but not here. Our traditional policy runs with the Golden Rule of the Man of Nazareth, and for us who believe in his mission on earth no further argument is needed. It is gratifying to us that our people have been in the main true to our national policy. It is altogether reasonable to believe that they will swing back to this policy as certainly as the magnetic needle when disturbed swings back to its pole.

I shall now deal with the second question—justice to the Chinese people and government as respects things which are domestic to them.

The first Minister of the United States who took up residence at the imperial capital was Mr. Burlingame.

He arrived at Peking in April, or May, 1862. He found there Sir Frederick Bruce, a descendant of the Bruce of Bannockburn, Minister for Great Britain; M. Berthemy, the French Minister, whose mother was American; and Gen. Vlangaly, who represented Russia. All these were notable men. Sir Frederick Bruce and M. Berthemy afterwards represented their respective governments at Washington. Gen. Vlangaly was a diplomat of wide experience and much ability. Mr. Burlingame addressed himself soon to a study of conditions, and to this very question of what justice called for in the relations of the United States and China. He was a man of ardent temperament and of the broadest humanity. A war between England and France and China had just ended, and the Western States were practically at the beginning of a new era in their relations with China. Foreign representatives before the war had been unable to reach Peking, and, as a consequence, the gravest misunderstandings of the policies of China, on our part, and of our policies, on the side of China, were prevalent. Mr. Burlingame conceived the idea that foreign representatives in China should cooperate with one another in order that just things only might be done toward China and the Chinese, and that just things might be effectively demanded of them. In a dispatch to myself he formulated this proposition, stating that the other representatives at Peking were in accord with him and that he wished the consular officers of the United States to live up to it. He himself named this policy, "The coöperative policy."

During the fourteen years of my service at Shanghai, and during my five years' service as Minister to Peking, I can say that the co-operative policy was well maintained. During that time, so far as I can remember, no foreign missionary was killed or greatly ill-treated throughout all China. Commerce during that period

became greatly extended; the Government became more and more impressed with the fact that it ought to regard the foreign states without fear or jealousy, that its best interests would be promoted by peaceful relations, and that reforms in domestic policies must be inaugurated in order to meet the new conditions resulting from an enlarged foreign intercourse.

I left China in the fall of 1880, and, so far as I know, the co-operative policy was held to, more or less perfectly, down to the date of the China-Japanese War. I have often thought that if it had been sustained at its best, the foreign representatives of Pekin would have been able to prevent that war. The war came however; and the results indicated a degree of weakness on the part of China that had not been dreamed of in Western States and perhaps hardly by intelligent foreigners in China. The war, as you will remember, resulted in the conquest by Japan of Chinese territory on the northern side of the Gulf of Pechili. It so happened that this was territory across which, to the gulf, transit facilities were very much needed by Russia. She had no port open all the year on the Japan Sea. Port Arthur on the gulf is open throughout the year. After the treaty between China and Japan, by which China ceded to Japan this very territory, was signed, Russia interfered with the assistance of France and Germany, and persuaded Japan to accept in lieu of that territory a larger money indemnity and the island of Formosa. A part of this transaction was a secret treaty between China and Russia, under which China agreed to permit Russia to build a railway down to Port Arthur, and to lease the port to Russia for a long period of years. Russia, therefore, was securing a *quid pro quo* for her great service to China.

Of course this treaty came to be a matter of common knowledge, and later on Germany seized the port of

Kiao-Chau on the southeastern shore of the gulf. This was done, as you will remember, on the pretext that it was in reprisal for the murder of two German missionaries. Still later France made certain demands for additional territory near her Cochin-Chinese boundary, and England acquired the port and fortress of Wei-hai-wei, on the southern gulf coast opposite Port Arthur. You will remember also that Italy made a demand upon China for a location in the Chusan Archipelago opposite the mouth of the Yangtsze. It was a carnival of territorial lust that went on.

Following these seizures of Chinese territory, notably the two on the southern side of the Gulf of Pechili, there came to the people of that region and to the government at Peking a period of unrest which culminated in the Boxer outrages.

I have recited these facts—first, the peaceful course of relations between 1862 and the time of the Japanese war, and second, the grave disturbances that followed the Japanese war—to indicate to your mind how far the policy of justice initiated by Burlingame secured good results, and how soon disaster followed after the invasions of the integrity of Chinese territory.

And I propose to leave the discussion of our duty to China on her own soil just here. She responded when she was treated with justice; she responded also when she was treated with injustice. And I know not who could expect that human nature would work out differently.

I come now to the third division of our subject— our duties in the broad field of foreign relations at large with China.

There have been persons who have held that the United States has suddenly come to be a "world power." In the time of my service in China, running even through the days of our civil war, I never dreamed that my country

was anything other than a world power. I have told you what Mr. Burlingame accomplished as our representative in China. Surely his policy had weight because it was the policy of an American minister. But whether we are to-day—and doubtless we are—more of a world power than we were at that time, our duties are not different. He sought to maintain the Chinese Government, to help it build itself up to the demands of a new era. He perhaps never said that a prime duty for us was to secure the absolute recognition of the integrity of Chinese territory. His policy did for a time promote that end as perfectly almost as if it had been enunciated for the purpose. And this should be our policy now.

It so happens that there are other nations whose desire, not to say duty, is to maintain the integrity of China. This is notably true of Japan. She ought never to have made war on China. The two great Asiatic states should have stood in firm alliance with one another, in order to forestall foreign aggressions. To-day Japan appreciates the mistake that she made and is earnestly seeking to upbuild China. England surely can have no other object in China than to preserve there a free field for her merchants. She is overburdened with foreign possessions already. Moreover, England in these days is far away more under the control of broad humanitarian ideas than she ever was in the past. The United States, Japan and England, standing together for the preservation of China, would dominate the situation. Russia has secured her outlet to the Gulf. Presumably the destiny of Manchuria is to fall under Russian control. But Manchuria is not a necessary part of China. It could be lost without serious harm to the empire. France has large possessions south of China, and it will take her generations to bring those districts into productive conditions. Germany is commercially ambitious; it was because she expected great things to

come of her occupation of Kiao-Chau that she planted herself there. Away back of Kiao-Chau, in the provinces of Shan-si and Shen-si, are the finest coal and iron fields in the world. Possession of those fields would make Germany a great factor in the industrial developments of the future. But with the United States, England and Japan standing firm for the integrity of China there would be no chance for Germany to obtain control in Shan-si and Shen-si, and no reason why the resources of that district should not be exploited on a right basis by China with the assistance of foreigners at large.

I make a great deal of the proposition that the territorial integrity of China must be maintained. I consider it the question that underlies all other questions. When China has come to feel that her territorial rights are not to be assailed she will abandon her attitude of distrust, and treat the issues arising in the course of foreign relations with the desire to be on good terms with all the world. She will come to see that to be respected she must be strong, and that in order to be strong she must develop the resources of the Empire. A great, self-respecting, competent state will then have come into existence. This all has happened to Japan. The people of China are not inferior to those of Japan, and their status among the nations should be vastly greater by reason of the magnitude of their population, territory and resources.

You will ask what this country can do to this end. I have pointed you to what Mr. Burlingame did in his time. His work attracted little attention. It was all done on his own initiative, yet it brought good things to China while he lived and for thirty years after he had passed away. Surely so much done by an individual minister of our country points to what might be done by our national administration working with precision

and certainty on a preconceived and cherished policy

Our government has done much to this end of late. When the seizures of Chinese territory began Mr. Hay had not gotten his bearings. He put out with much confidence and with much acceptance his "Open Door" policy. He asked the powers that had seized Chinese territory to promise that our trading privileges in such territories should not be abridged. This was an impotent policy, because the pledges secured were not embodied in treaties, and if they had been would stand just so long as the given powers chose to let them stand. It fell short of securing the condition under which in all China our commerce could have free course—the integrity of all her territory. It was not just to the old Empire to condone the partition of her territories. The course taken I have often thought made us *particeps criminis*. It was as if Mr. Hay had said, "The old man China is wounded and weak; take from him what you like, but if you find in his clothes anything that belongs to us, spare that." Surely this was not an attitude of which compatriots of Burlingame, citizens of the Great Republic, could be proud.

But Mr. Hay has been finding his bearings. The Boxer outrages set him thinking. He saw, and all the world has seen, that it was another case of cause and effect. The powers had sowed the wind and they were reaping the whirlwind. Mr. Hay has learned his lesson, and since then, as I am fain to believe, has seen that if there is to be peace in China, and peace between the powers having to do with China, the territorial rights of China must be respected. I give him unbounded credit for what he has done in this direction.

It is all very wonderful to me that our statesmen and our people have failed to be properly interested in China, and have failed to see that the United States has a great stake in the empire. The United States

and China are the great states of the Pacific Ocean. They face one another across its waters, and in bulk and in resources they are second to no well-centered powers of the earth. Our people can find there broad markets if we can keep the markets free. We cannot afford to allow Europe to aggrandize itself on the Pacific to our harm. The situation inflamed my imagination when as a young man I was resident in China. As an old man, the ardor of youth all gone, it still inflames my imagination. It is a case where justice and interest alike demand that the United States should throw all its wonderful influence into the scale in order that the Chinese people may be encouraged to work out for themselves a noble destiny. China is no sick man. The empire waits only for the torch of a great leader. Her people are intelligent, industrious, orderly. The nation has every element out of which a great leader may build a puissant state. America should watch the time and help along the consummation.

And now in review of all that I have said our conclusions are plain. We must deal justly with China in matters domestic to us; in matters domestic to them; and in matters of international policy. But we must do these things with earnest endeavor, seeing clearly the ends to which they lead. We must stand for China as we did for Mexico, when the word of an American statesman caused the proudest European potentate of his day to recall his army of conquest. We must have faith that the United States is a world power on the side of moral weight, rather than because we have soldiers and sailors at command. It is a great thing to have magnificent power. It is greater to use that power with long forethought for beneficent ends.

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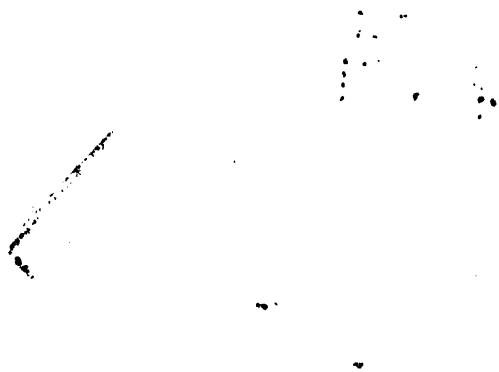

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